

Second Sunday of Lent B/2018

The readings of this second Sunday of Lent talk about the revelation of our final destiny. They show us that our trust and perseverance in God, in spite of human suffering, will yield fruit for our eternal salvation. They invite us to listen to Jesus and follow him so that we come to share one day in his glory.

The first reading recalls the trial of Abraham as he was called to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. It starts with the difficult demand of God to Abraham to offer Isaac as a holocaust. It shows how, without a second thought and without hesitating, Abraham obeyed God.

Then, the text shows the reaction of God who prevented Abraham from carrying out the project of sacrificing Isaac by providing him with a ram to offer as a holocaust. It equally shows how, because of Abraham's obedience, God promised to bless him with numerous descendants and a land of plenty.

What is behind this text is first of all the idea that faith in God is demanding. There is also the idea that any renunciation of one's privilege and interest for the sake of God's Kingdom brings us God's reward. The last idea is related to the truth that those who, in times of trouble and turmoil, do not renounce their faith, but rather remain faithful, God will build them a bright future.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is transfigured on the mountain. First of all the Gospel mentions the fact that Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain where he was transfigured. It also mentions that at the moment of transfiguration, his clothes became dazzling white, and then Moses and Elijah appeared conversing with him.

Then, the Gospel gives the reaction of Peter who wanted to build three tents for them to live in. After that, the Gospel recalls the incident of the cloud that overshadowed them while a voice coming from heaven attested that Jesus was his beloved son whom they had to listen to. Finally, the Gospel speaks of the disappearance of the two men and the interdiction of Jesus to his disciples to talk to anyone about their experience up the mountain.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the revelation of our glory to come. What do I mean by that? In order to explain the point I want to make, let me start with a simple observation. In fact, our daily life is a mixture of contrasted experiences, made up of joy and sadness, laughter and tears, health and sickness, happiness and sufferings, success and failures, serenity and trials, etc.

At each level of our life and in our journey, we have to face the ups and downs of life until the day our journey is complete. At the down moments of life, such as those of tears, sickness, suffering and struggles, and which we can also call the low key moments of life, people tend to be discouraged, to despair and to lose their faith in God. Those moments of suffering are a real trial because they are instances in which the convictions of life are shaken and the certitudes that have always supported people lose their consistence.

For St Paul, indeed, those difficult moments, as terrible as they might be, should not separate us from the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ. That is why he thinks that,

given that sufferings and trials are accepted for the sake of Jesus' kingdom, nobody has the right to accuse us or be against those who belong to Jesus.

A question that comes up on this level is this: How on earth can St Paul be so optimistic about human suffering while people are hurting and crying? Well, St Paul can maintain such a position only because he is convinced that those who suffer for the sake of Jesus will one day share with him in the joy of his resurrection.

It is that conviction and certitude of faith in the eternal life that led, in the past, Abraham to accept bluntly the demand of God to sacrifice Isaac, his only son. But, because he showed such a tremendous trust in God, God spared the life of his son and rewarded him with numerous descendants and a beautiful land.

Thus, Abraham becomes the symbol of trust in God in times of trial and a beacon of hope for those who believe in the reality of the world to come. If he did not believe in the certainty of eternal life and the reality of the glory to come, it would make no sense for him to envisage the sacrifice of his only son. As the letter to the Hebrews says, "(Abraham) reasoned that God was able to raise (his son) from the dead, and so he received Isaac back as a symbol" (Heb 11: 20).

The reality of the glory to come is what appears in the transfiguration of Jesus. This episode happened precisely after Jesus had spoken to his disciples about his suffering and death. As we would expect, the disciples were very saddened by this news.

In order to console them and to show them that there is more to hope for beyond human suffering, Jesus, who was used to going up the mountain to pray alone, took with him this time Peter, James and John. His intention was clearly that they might be the witnesses of what would happen to him up the mountain.

In that sense, his deep motivation was that they come to realize with their own eyes that even if he has to pass through suffering and death, he is prepared for great glory. Therefore, in turn, they too have to pass through suffering for his sake in order to share in his glory.

That is why the transfiguration of Jesus sheds light on our own sufferings. It shows in particular the outcome of our life which will end up in glory if we remain faithful to Jesus in spite of our present suffering. As we will share in his glory, our mortal body will become like his in the glory of heaven. Therefore, we are not suffering for nothing; we are not running in vain, but for a goal, namely to share one day in the joy of Jesus.

With all that in mind, we understand why we have to listen to Jesus. We understand also why Moses and Elijah are conversing with him in order to invite us to trust him, because in him are brought together the Law and the prophecies. May this Lent be an opportunity to recommit our life to Jesus and to hope for our glory to come! May God bless you all!

Genesis 22: 1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8: 31-34; Mark 9: 2-10

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